

Gibson Fahnestock House
(Republic of China Chancery)
2311 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D. C.

HABS No. DC-259

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202 -

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of Interior
Washington, D. C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
GIBSON FAHNESTOCK HOUSE
(REPUBLIC OF CHINA CHANCERY)

Page DC-259

DC, WASH, 202-

Location: 2311 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C.;
on the north side of Massachusetts Avenue and
approximately 230 feet west of Sheridan Circle.
UTM: 18.322065 .4308880

Present Owner: Republic of China

Present Occupant: Republic of China

Present Use: Chancery

Statement of
Significance: Originally a private residence, this semidetached
building was designed in the 18th-century French
manner. Finely crafted academic details are combined
to form a scheme that is harmonious and crisply delin-
eated. [Floors as in HABS D. C. Catalog.]

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Lot and Square:

The building is located in Square 2516, lot 63 (formerly lots 17
and 18, and part of 21 in Block 11, "Kalorama Heights").

B. Original and Subsequent Owners:

The following chain of title to the property shows the owners of
the present structure and of any known preceding structure on the
site:

1908 Deed November 27, 1908, recorded December 2, 1908 in
Liber 3186 folio 241

Potomac Realty Co.

To

Gibson Fahnestock

Lots 17 and 18 in Block 11, "Kalorama Heights."

"This Deed...by and between The Potomac Realty Company, a
body corporate duly incorporated under the laws in force
in the State of New Jersey...party hereto of the first part,
and Gibson Fahnestock of the District of Columbia, party
hereto of the second part..."

NOTE: April 16, 1909 Gibson Fahnestock combined lots 17,
18 and the West 18.25 feet of lot 21 (of subdivision
by Rodgers and Stellwagen Trustees recorded in County
Book 7, page 34), Block 11, "Kalorama Heights" into

lot 63. Recorded in Subdivisions Liber 35, folio 126, Office of the Surveyor, District of Columbia. (Nathan C. Wyeth also signed the recorded combination.)

Will of Gibson Fahnestock was recorded April 26, 1917 in Will Book No. 93, page No. 13, Registrar of Wills, District of Columbia. The will stated:

"I, Gibson Fahnestock, of Newport, Rhode Island,... give, devise and bequeath unto my wife, Carolyn Snowden Fahnestock, my house and premises at Newport, also my house and premises at Washington, D.C...."

1909 Deed March 23, 1909, recorded March 24, 1909 in Liber 3221 folio 223

Joseph Beale et ux, Margaret K. C.

To

Gibson Fahnestock

Part of lot 21 in Block 11, "Kalorama Heights."

"...Beginning for the same at a point in Decatur Place at the northwest corner of said lot and running thence south along the dividing line between said lot...(21) and lot...(18) in said subdivision...12.06 feet to the northwesterly corner of lot...(17) in said subdivision; thence southeast along the line between lots...(21) and...(17)...25 feet to the northeasterly corner of said lot...(17); thence north at right angles to Decatur Place...29.15 feet to the south line of...Decatur Place; thence west...18.25 feet to the point of beginning..."

1938 Quit-Claim-Deed September 30, 1938, recorded November 17, 1938 Liber 7289 folio 398

Snowden Fahnestock et ux

Gibson Fahnestock (son) et ux

Margaret Fahnestock Drummond-Wolff et vir

To

The Montpelier Corporation

"This Deed...by and between Snowden Fahnestock and Gibson Fahnestock, both of the City and County of Newport in the State of Rhode Island, and Margaret Drummond-Wolff, of London, England, parties of the first part, and The Montpelier Corporation, a corporation organized and existing under the laws of the State of Rhode Island and located in Newport, party of the second part...Lots...(17) and...(18) in Block...(11), 'Kalorama Heights'...said premises having been devised to these Grantors by...the Will of Carolyn S. Fahnestock, late

of Newport, Rhode Island, deceased..."

1943 Deed April 6, 1943, recorded April 12, 1943 in
Liber 7847 folio 557

The Montpelier Corporation
To
The National Government of the
Republic of China

"...for and in consideration of the sum of Seventy-five thousand Dollars..."

Source: Recorder of Deeds, Washington, D.C.

C. Date of Erection:

The building was begun in July 1909 and completed in November 1910.

D. Building Permits:

The applications for the following building permits were filed by the architect, contractor or owner's agent and provide significant data:

No. 22, July 2, 1909

Permit to build dwelling

Owner: Gibson Fahnestock
Architect: Nathan Wyeth
Builder: George A. Fuller Co.
Estimated cost: \$150,000.

No. 2084, September 27, 1909

Permit to erect passenger elevator

Owner: Gibson Fahnestock
Mechanic: Otis Elevator Company
Estimated cost: \$3000.
Location: "Side, near center"

No. 558, August 1, 1910

Permit to build retaining wall at rear of building

Owner: Gibson Fahnestock
Architect: N. C. Wyeth
Estimated cost: \$800.

No. 1772, October 8, 1910

Permit to erect iron marquise

Owner: Gibson Fahnestock
Architect: N. C. Wyeth

Builder: George A. Fuller Co
Estimated cost: \$550.

Source: Record Group 351, Records of the District of Columbia, Building Permits 1877-1949, the Legislative and Natural Resources Branch, Civil Division, Nat'l Archives/Records Service, Washington, D. C.

E. Alterations and Additions:

The building permits available do not indicate any significant changes to the residence - though the owners have partitioned the original drawing and dining rooms for office space.

F. Architect: Nathan C. Wyeth, Washington, D.C.

Nathan Corwith Wyeth (1870 - 1963) was graduated from the art school of the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1889. He then spent ten years studying at the École des Beaux Arts in Paris. After one year (1899-1900) as a designer with the Washington office of Carrère and Hastings, Wyeth joined the Office of the Supervising Architect, Treasury Department.

From 1904 through 1905, he was chief designer for the Architect of the Capitol. There is evidence that Wyeth was involved in the design of the "old" Senate Office Building and the Cannon Office Building at the time. A photograph of a rendering of the "Terraces, Balustrades, and Approaches, Senate Office Building" indicates "Wyeth and Sullivan, Consulting Architects". Another rendering, "Office Building, House of Representatives, Washington, D.C.: B Street Elevation," is signed by Wyeth. Unfortunately, neither rendering is dated. (Files of the Commission of Fine Arts)

From 1905 to 1919 Wyeth maintained a private practice, during which time he "designed many of the city's most gracious homes that sheltered the city's most prominent people and entertained its most sparkling society under chandeliers and carved panelling that matched elegant exteriors." (Mrs. Nathan C. Wyeth, The Sunday Star, 12-13-70) He also designed the Battleship Maine Monument in Arlington Cemetery, the Tidal Basin Bridge, Key Bridge, the Old Emergency Hospital and Columbia Hospital.

During World War I, Mr. Wyeth, as a major in the construction division of the Office of the Surgeon General, designed hospitals. After the war, he became ill and spent several years recuperating in Switzerland. He returned to Washington to open his practice again, only to lose it during the stock market crash six years later.

From 1934 until his retirement in 1946, Wyeth was the Municipal Architect of the District of Columbia. Some of the public buildings he designed were: The Municipal Center; The Recorder

of Deeds Building; the Georgetown Branch of the Public Library;
Woodrow Wilson High School; and the National Guard Armory.

Sources: The New York Times, 9-3-63, 33:2 (obituary).
The Sunday Star, 12-30-70, F 1:1, "Architect's Widow
Recalls the Past."
The Washington Post, 8-31-63, B 3:1 (obituary).

G. Known Plans, Drawings, Elevations, etc.:

Elevation of retaining wall. Blueprint. Scale 1/4" = 1'
Filed with Permit No. 558, August 1, 1910

Projection plan of marquise. Ink on linen.
Filed with Permit No. 1772, October 8, 1910
"Res. for Gibson Fahnestock, Esq.
N. C. Wyeth, Arch't
Washington, D.C."

Plan of marquise: side elevation of marquise; partial front
elevation; plan showing location of gateway; side elevation
of gateway showing stiffening rod. Blueprint (1).
"Exterior Ironwork
Res. for Gibson Fahnestock, Esq.
3-16-10 "

H. Important Old Views: none found

I. Residents:

1. City and telephone directories list the following tenants:

1911	Gibson Fahnestock
1912	No listing
1913	Gibson Fahnestock
1914	No listing
1915-1917	Gibson Fahnestock
1918-1919	Mrs. Gibson Fahnestock
1920-1930	Caroline S. Fahnestock
1931	Vacant
1932-1934	Gibson Fahnestock [son]
1935-1937	Carolyn S. Fahnestock
1938-1941	Vacant
1942	Snowden Fahnestock
1943	China Defense Supplies, Inc.
1944-1947	Chinese Embassy, Supply Commission
1948	Universal Trading Corp.
1949-1951	Chinese Embassy, Commercial Counselor's Office
1952-1972	Chinese Embassy, Chancery

2. Biographies of residents:

Gibson Fahnestock was the son of Harris Fahnestock, president of the First National Bank of New York. Gibson worked in the bank for several years and then retired. However, he was to remain a prominent New York and, later, Washington financier. For many years after his retirement, he and his family lived in Rome and on his estate on the Riviera.

After the Fahnestocks came to Washington, they divided their time between their residence here and their summer home in Newport, R. I. Gibson Fahnestock was first listed in the city directories at the New Willard in 1906. His name appears again from 1908 through 1910 at 1812 I Street, N.W. During this period he purchased land and built a house at 2311 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W.

Fahnestock died in March 1917 leaving his wife, Carolyn, and three children: Gibson, Snowden A., and Margaret.

Source: The Evening Star, 3-2-17, 7:7 (obituary).

Carolyn Snowden Andrews Fahnestock (1862-1937), widow of Gibson, was the daughter of General Richard Snowden Andrews (of the Confederate Army) and of the former Mary Katherine Lee, of Baltimore. "Prominent in the social circles of Washington, New York, and Newport, Mrs. Fahnestock was active all her life in philanthropic, religious and patriotic movements. During the World War, she was a leader in the Red Cross and other relief activities and a founder of the Women's Naval Service and the National Service Schools for Women." (The New York Times, 10-19-37) At the time of her death in 1937, she was vice-president of the Home for Incurables, located at 2025 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W.

Mrs. Fahnestock died at the age of 75 while staying at the Sulgrave Club (1801 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W.) and waiting for her home at 2311 Massachusetts Avenue to be opened "for the season." Her three children were living at the time of her death: Col. Snowden A. Fahnestock, of Washington, D.C.; Gibson Fahnestock, who was living in China; and Mrs. Henry Drummond-Wolf, of London, England.

Sources: The National Cyclopedia of American Biography, Vol. XXX, New York: James T. White & Company, 1943, p. 553.

The Evening Star, 10-19-37, 12:4 (obituary).
The New York Times, 10-19-37, 25:3 (obituary).
The Washington Daily News, 10-19-37, 11:1 (obituary).
The Washington Post, 10-19-37, 26:2 (obituary).
The Washington Post, 10-24-37, S4:5.

Gibson Fahnestock (son) and his wife lived in Washington and New York, and at one point had a home in France. City directories place them at 2311 Massachusetts Avenue from 1932 through 1934. They were living in Manila, P.I. when the Japanese invaded in 1941. Both were placed in concentration camps. In June 1942, Mrs. Fahnestock was released because of bad health. Though Mr. Fahnestock was still imprisoned at the time of his wife's death, continued research has not revealed anything beyond his imprisonment.

Source: The New York Times, 10-9-42, 22:3 (obituary, Mrs. Fahnestock).

Col. Snowden Andrews Fahnestock (1886-1962), the second son of Gibson and Carolyn Fahnestock, was listed as a resident in 1942 - one year before the sale of the house to the Republic of China.

Col. Fahnestock was a veteran of the two World Wars, serving in the United States Army Reserve from 1917 to 1946. During World War I, he was in the first Battalion, 308th Infantry, 77th Division and received the rank of major, the Purple Heart, and the French Croix de Guerre. He served as a Colonel in Intelligence at the Pentagon during the Second World War.

After World War I, Fahnestock was an "officer in many corporations, and was a director of the First National Bank of New York City until resigning in 1942 for war duty. The bank has since merged with National City Bank." (The Evening Star, 11-11-62)

Col. Fahnestock married Elizabeth Bertron in 1910. After their divorce in 1925, he married Helen Morgan Moran. Their well-publicized divorce was granted in 1935. He was remarried in 1936 to the former Mrs. Beatrice Beck Tuck.

Sources: The Evening Star, 1-4-35, B 1:1.
The Evening Star, 1-11-35, 3:2.
The Evening Star, 10-8-35, B 1:5.
The Evening Star, 11-30-35, 1:2 (obituary, Mrs. Helen Fahnestock).
The Evening Star, 11-11-62, B 7:1 (obituary, Col. Fahnestock).
The New York Times, 11-11-62, 88:7 (obituary, Col. Fahnestock).

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This semidetached structure has Louis XVI exterior and interior details.
2. Condition: good, primarily original, some interior remodeling and partitioning. [Floors as in HABS D.C. Catalog.]

B. Exterior Description:

1. Overall dimensions: The three-and-one-half-story-plus-basement-and-attic structure is 70'-0" from sidewalk to roof ridge. It measures 42'-0" across the three bay south (Massachusetts Avenue) and north elevations; 88'-6" along the six bay (first floor) east elevation; and 92'-6" along the west party wall.
2. Foundations: concrete footings and slab.
3. Wall construction: The walls are tan Roman brick, except for the south elevation and the first two east elevation bays which are limestone. The building base is capped by a block water table acting as window sill for the rusticated ground floor. An entablature string course (with a fascia and roll architrave; a plain frieze; and a cyma, corona and roll cornice) acts as base for the range-coursed second and third floors, the bays of which are separated by two-story, fluted, Corinthian pilasters on pedestals.
4. Structure: brick bearing walls with steel structural members.
5. Mechanical: The building has hot air, in-wall ducts and registers. The electric lighting is combined with a gas system in the service areas. The passenger elevator is by Otis.
6. Porches, stoops, bulkheads, etc.: Three granite risers ascend to a 12'-6" wide stoop flanked by panelled limestone balustrades having acanthus console terminals and block caps turned from the building water table. The caps support cast iron side panels and scrolls below a decorative marquise with guilloche frieze.

Each second-floor window has a shallow, decorative cast iron, rocaille railing centered by a wreath. At the north elevation, brick retaining walls enclose granite risers, which descend to the basement.

7. Chimneys: Visible from ground level are three chimneys. The east and west walls each have one of Roman brick with a limestone cap, while the west wall has one of limestone, capped by a full entablature.

8. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: The original entrance door has been replaced. The crossette, double fascia, and egg-and-dart-limestone architrave has an acanthus scroll keystone with foliate sprays.

b. Windows: All windows are casement, two-lights in width. The ground floor has decorative wrought iron grilles. The floor-length second-floor bays have transoms.

Each second-floor bay has a guilloche frieze within a crossette limestone architrave on a raised ground. The dentil cap and frieze are flanked by acanthus consoles which support a cyma cornice. Each third-floor bay has a scrolled keystone and spray, crossette architrave on a raised ground. Each architrave interrupts the building entablature.

9. Roof:

a. Shape, covering: A false parapet supports the slate, mansard roof, which has a copper egg and dart gutter, bead flashing and a pulvinated egg and dart ridge cap with built-up flat roofing behind.

b. Cornice, eaves: The full Corinthian entablature is limestone. The fascia architrave, plain frieze, and dentil and egg and dart cornice mouldings are broken forward over each pilaster. The false parapet is panelled.

c. Dormers, cupolas, towers: Interrupting the false parapet are limestone ~~fourth~~-floor dormers having panelled strips flanked by angular consoles and capped by bracket scrolls. The bracket scrolls flank a guilloche frieze and keystone, and support a segmentally-arched pediment. Centered over each bay is a wood, fifth-floor or attic dormer with a segmentally arched pediment.

C. Interior Description:

1. Floor plans: The ground floor entrance and vestibule give access to the entrance hall, which is followed by the stair hall and service area. East of the vestibule and entrance hall is the library; east of the stair hall is a cloak room and lavatory. (See plan.)

The main stair ascends along the west wall to the second floor

hall with the drawing room (on Massachusetts Avenue) to its south and the dining room to the north. Both are connected by the reception room to the east. West of the dining room is the service area. (See plan.)

The third and fourth floors have major bedrooms and baths. The fifth floor contains servants' quarters.

2. Spaces: (The drawing and dining rooms were not available for inspection.)

Entrance hall: (see photograph)

- a. Flooring: limestone blocks, two feet square, laid diagonally. Carpeted.
- b. Baseboard: 6" limestone.
- c. Walls: tan limestone. Set in bead and ogee mouldings are single raised panels with corner rosettes. Flanking the library door are paired and panelled pilasters with acanthus leaf and gouge capitals. Single pilasters of similar design frame rectangular niches flanking the west chimney wall. The niches contain built-in limestone benches on acanthus consoles. Between the entrance door and west bay is a shell niche. Pilaster piers of similar design to the above frame the stair hall.
- d. Cornice: The wood cornice (painted white), of fascia, astragal, cyma and bracket courses, is carried across the piers.
- e. Ceiling: 11'-0" high, plaster painted white.
- f. Doorways and doors: Each leaf of the beveled glass double door entrance has a decorative tulip, lattice and rosette cast iron grille.

The oak, double door to the library has three raised panels in a cyma moulding.

Both doors have a limestone scroll with foliate sprays.

- g. Hardware: brass door locks and bundled-reed handles.
- h. Lighting: There are six, two-light, triglyph-and-urn, brass sconces with reeded arms holding opaque glass light bowls.
- i. Heating: The west wall, limestone chimney mantel has pilasters with oak leaf panels and acanthus console caps which flank a rinceau frieze and support a shelf and raised panel hood. (See photograph.)

Library: (dry-wall partitioning)

- a. Flooring: basket weave parquetry.
- b. Baseboard: 8", oak with cyma cap.
- c. Dado: oak, flat panels in cyma moulding.
- d. Chairrail: 3'-0" high, oak with fascia and cyma.
- e. Walls: oak. Flat panels in cyma moulding. The windows are flanked by rosette-centered, panelled pilasters on pedestals with acanthus leaf capitals. At the west wall and flanking the left side of the north chimney are walnut cabinets which support built-in bookshelves.
- f. Cornice: plaster; fascia, cyma and corona with fret soffit.
- g. Ceiling: 11'-0" high, plaster painted white.
- h. Doorways and doors: The oak double door to the entrance hall has three raised panels in cyma mouldings within a cyma and double fascia architrave. East of the mantel, a door leads through a short antehall to the lavatory.
- i. Hardware: brass door knobs and reeded handles.
- j. Lighting: There are two, three-light, bronze sconces with swags.
- k. Heating: The north wall, grey marble(4'-0" high) chimney mantel (in the French Baroque manner) has an adapted bolection surround between cyma and ogee mouldings.

Stair hall: (see photographs)

- a. Flooring: limestone blocks, two feet square, laid diagonally. Carpeted.
- b. Baseboard: 6", limestone.
- c. Walls: limestone. Raised panels are set in bead and ogee mouldings. A pilaster with acanthus scroll cap flanks the stair well at the north wall.
- d. Cornice: wood painted white; three fascia and bead courses with cyma.
- e. Ceiling: 11'-0" high, plaster painted white.
- f. Doorways and doors: The single oak doors to the east closet

and lavatory both have three raised panels in cyma mouldings, and plain limestone keystones. The doorway to the north service area has an acanthus scroll keystone with foliate sprays. The keystone interrupts a raised panel with corner rosettes in an ogee moulding.

- g. Hardware: brass door locks and reeded handles.
- h. Lighting: The stair landings are lighted by single, two-light, triglyph and urn, brass sconces with reeded arms and opaque glass light bowls.
- i. Heating: Beneath the stair stringer is a hot air register with a Greek key and link, brass grille and a limestone voussoir lintel.
- j. Stair: The main stair ascends nine risers west to the first landing (the first three treads of which are terminated in concentric semicircles), twelve risers north to the second landing, and three risers east to the first floor hall. The risers, treads and closed stringers are limestone. The stringers begin on the third tread from the ground floor. The decorative cast iron banister has alternating oval guilloche and decorative panels between urn finials. The handrail is wood. (See photograph.)

Reception room: (painted grey)

- a. Flooring: decorative parquetry with fret border.
- b. Baseboard: 6", wood with cyma cap.
- c. Dado: flush, plaster panels with incised border.
- d. Chairrail: 3'-0" high, wood with fascia and cyma.
- e. Walls: flush, plaster panels with incised border and ribbon-roll moulding.
- f. Cornice: plaster; bead, acanthus frieze and talon.
- g. Ceiling: 14'-6" high, plaster; cove ending in two block courses.
- h. Doorways and doors: The three-panelled double doors to the west stair hall, the south drawing room and the north dining room all have a crossette architrave capped by an urn and rinceau frieze. The architrave and frieze are framed within a talon moulding. The frieze is flanked by consoles supporting an egg and dart, and corona cornice.
- i. Hardware: brass. The stair hall door has urn and rinceau, rectangular rim locks, reeded handles, and acorn finial

- j. Lighting: There are four, three-light, brass sconces, the lights held by a central cherub and flanking griffins.
- k. Heating: The east wall chimney has a white marble hearth and a decorative cast-iron firebox. The white marble 3'-0" high mantel (in the Georgian manner) has yellow marble trim. Beaded consoles support a bead architrave, a wreath and spray frieze broken forward over either console, and a corona and cyma shelf.

D. Site:

- 1. Setting and orientation: The building faces south on a pentagonal lot measuring 50' on the south (Massachusetts Avenue); 93'-2" on the west (party wall); 41'-3" on the northwest (Decatur Place); 29'-2" on the northeast; and 100' on the east.
- 2. Enclosures: A granite, southwest retaining wall is capped by a panelled limestone balustrade with a console terminal. A decorative cast-iron, east-wall gateway has a guilloche frieze and ogee pediment centered by a wreath with sprays and ribbon. The gate connects to a brick wall capped by a wrought-iron fence which marks the east property line. Brick retaining walls with wrought-iron railings enclose the north and west property lines (an iron stair to Decatur Place has been removed).
- 3. Outbuildings: none.
- 4. Walks: brick-paved north court and semicircular concrete entrance drive with granite curbing.
- 5. Landscaping: grass and single evergreen.

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This document, made from records donated to the Historic American Buildings Survey by the Commission of Fine Arts, 708 Jackson Place, N.W., Washington, D.C., represents studies of prime, typical, diversified and sumptuous architecture erected primarily between the years 1890 and 1930, when American society and architecture were greatly influenced by the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. The material, originally organized for adaptation to the Historic American Buildings Survey format, was first published in Massachusetts Avenue Architecture, Vol. 1, in 1973, issued by the Commission of Fine Arts, Charles H. Atherson, Secretary; Donald B. Myer, Assistant Secretary; Jeffrey R. Carson, Architectural Historian; Lynda L. Smith, Historian; and J. L. Sibley Jennings, Jr., Architect. Photographs were made for the Commission by Jack E. Boucher, Linwood, New Jersey; J. Alexander, Wheaton, Maryland; and the Commission of Fine Arts Staff. The material, donated December 1973, was coordinated for the HABS documentation in 1978 by Lucy Pope Wheeler, HABS Writer/Editor.

Documentation of this property could not have been achieved without the cooperation of organizations and people concerned with the Commission's study-- The Embassy of (Nationalist) China, His Excellency James C. H. Shen, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary; His Excellency Chow Shu-Kal, former Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary; Mr. Martin Wong, Minister (Special Assistant to the Ambassador), and Mr. Kuan-hua Tuanmu, First Secretary.

ADDENDUM
FOLLOWS ...

Addendum to
Gibson Fahnestock House (Republic of China Chancery,
Chinese Chancery)
2311 Massachusetts Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C.

HABS No. DC-259

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PHOTOGRAPH

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240